



Map of South-Eastern Nigeria Showing Igbo Language Area

# Igbo-English Dictionary

A Comprehensive Dictionary of the Igbo Language,  
with an English-Igbo Index

Michael J. C. Echeruo

Yale University Press • New Haven and London

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In loving memory of my mother

(Ugoeze) Martha Nwülari Echeruo

who worked with me on this Dictionary till her death in November, 1995



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## Abbreviations

adj	adjective/adjectival noun
adv	adverb/adverbial noun
alph	letter of the alphabet
aux	auxiliary to verbs
conj	conjunction
dem	demonstrative pronoun
esp	especially
excl	exclamation or interjection
H	High Tone
inter	interrogative pronoun
L	Low Tone
lit	literally
n	noun or nominal
nom	nominalization
num	numeral
prep	preposition
prn	pronoun
S	Downstepped Tone
sfx	suffix or enclitic
v	verb or verbal
var	variant
Yor	Yoruba
~	Examples follow
=	Meaning follows
*	Additional Note follows
<	Etymological Note
[]	Encloses Tone
()	Encloses Dialect Zone

## Books of the Bible

Acts	Acts
Chr	Chronicles
Cor	Corinthians
Est	Esther
Ezek	Ezekiel
Ezra	Ezra
Gen	Genesis
Heb	Epistle to the Hebrews
Is	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Jn	Letter to John
Job	Job
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	Luke
Mal	Malachi
Mt	Matthew
Num	Numbers
Prov	Proverbs
Ps	Psalms
Rev	Revelation
Sam	Samuel
Song	Song of Songs
Tit	Letter to Titus

## Introduction

### The Igbo Language

Igbo is one of the eight major languages in the Benue-Congo Group of African languages (Williamson 1989). Spoken by some 20 million Nigerians, it is one of the three "national languages" (the others being Hausa and Yoruba) so designated in the Nigerian Constitution. Although fairly sizeable dictionaries are available for Yoruba and Hausa, nothing comparable exists for Igbo. This dictionary is a modest first step towards meeting that need.

Every serious work on the Igbo language since J. P. Schön's *Ibo Primer* (1852) has had to provide some listing of Igbo words. Of the dedicated vocabulary lists, the best known are those of S. Crowther and J. P. Schön (1882 and 1883), the 1904 polyglot *Ibo Dictionary* by A. Ganot (and his *Grammaire Ibo*, 1879), Northcote W. Thomas's *English-Ibo Ibo-English Dictionary* (1913), and the *Dictionary of the Ibo Language: English-Ibo* (1923) by Archdeacon T. J. Dennis and others. More recently, we have R. G. Armstrong's *Comparative Wordlist of Five Igbo Dialects* (1967), *Igbo: A Learner's Dictionary* (1968) by B. F. Welmers and W. E. Welmers; and Kay Williamson's *Igbo-English Dictionary* (1972) which, although based on C. W. Pearman's manuscript wordlist, incorporates the work of C. N. and E. I. Madünagü, who, under Dr. Williamson's guidance, added new material to the collection.

Two Dictionaries have been produced by native speakers of the language: *Ökōwa Okwu: Igbo-English English-Igbo Dictionary* (1962) by F. C. Ögbalü and *A Modern English-Igbo Dictionary* (1985) by H. I. Nnaji. Both are important pioneering efforts. As the recent festschrift, *F. C. Ögbalü and the Igbo Language* (ed. A. E. Afigbo, 1995) amply reminds us, Dr. Ögbalü was the motive force behind Igbo language revival and development. Although, therefore, there are deficiencies in his compilation, it was his enthusiasm and commitment that made much subsequent work on Igbo possible. Every student of Igbo will remain grateful to him for that leadership. *Ökōwa Okwu*, unfortunately, tried to do two things at the same time: provide a list of original Igbo words, and supply acceptable Igbo transliterations for English words in common use, especially in the school system, e.g. bacteria = *bakiteria*, bank = *banki*, latitude = *latitudi*, Cantata = *Kantata*; and sulphur = *sölüfö*. It did neither as satisfactorily as intended. *Ökōwa Okwu* has a short English-Igbo wordlist, and an even shorter list of Igbo synonyms which was also intended to serve the community of students and teachers. H. I. Nnaji's *Modern English-Igbo Dictionary* (1985) is a different kind of work. It offers meanings in both English and Igbo for a wide selection of English headwords, essentially translating standard dictionary definitions of the English headwords into Igbo.

This *Igbo-English Dictionary* is an attempt at a comprehensive reference work. It collects discrete meaningful free-forms from various dialects of Igbo, and provides summary or extended meanings with examples as necessary. Because it was not conceived of as a Learner's Dictionary, this volume has not tried specifically to find or provide Igbo equivalents for particular English words. Quite the reverse: the dictionary has tried to identify Igbo words and to provide an English-language gloss to those words in as approximate a sense as is possible. In consequence, users anxious to find Igbo equivalents for particular English words may have to turn to the English Index for the closest synonym. Since many equivalents are provided, the user must determine the contexts in which particular equivalents are appropriate.